

THE UNITED STATES' ABILITY TO SUCCESSFULLY EFFECT REGIME CHANGE IN OTHER NATIONS

Since the turn of the century, the United States has faced many threats. Since the end of World War II, the majority of these threats focused on spreading Soviet-style communism beyond the Soviet block region. Another type of threat the US faced focused on its ability to conduct international trade. In each case, the US government used its powers to counter the threatening nation's actions, and reached an agreement suitable to the US. On occasion however, that tact was unsuccessful, and the US opted to change the ruling regime. Two such cases are Iran in 1953 and Haiti since 1915. The aim of this research is to determine how adept the US government has been at successfully effecting regime change in these two examples.

Following the Nazi invasion of the USSR, British and Russian troops invaded Iran in order to ensure the use of Iran's oil for the Russian Army as well as deny its use to the Nazis in WWII. However, British interest in Iranian oil actually reaches back to 1909 with the formation of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. The company's initial charter was to permit the British to extract and export Persian oil while providing the Persian government compensation for use of its natural resource. However, decades of disputes over the royalties from the export of the oil lead to multiple renegotiations of the contracts governing the arrangement. Reza Shah Pahlavi, the ruling Shah of Iran from 1925-1941, was viewed by the British government as a hindrance to their successful and profitable operations in Iran and the main reason the arrangement had to be frequently renegotiated. Then in 1941, when the Germans invaded the USSR, British and Soviet forces ousted Reza Shah Pahlavi as the Shah of Iran and installed his pro-Ally son Crown Prince Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. This provided the British with a willing partner in their oil operations and Britain once again enjoyed favorable terms in their arrangement with Tehran.¹

During the first ten years of Mohammad Pahlavi's rule, especially those following WWII, a nationalist movement grew strength, intending to reduce or eliminate long-term foreign

involvement within Iran. British involvement in Iran's oil trade then became the focus of the movement's efforts. In 1951, the Iranian parliament, led by its nationalist Prime Minister Mohammed Mosaddeq, voted to nationalize the nation's oil industry, forcibly removing Britain's influence and control. Parliament's actions naturally angered the British, who retaliated by declaring a boycott of Iranian oil. With a severe and immediate shortage of demand for its oil, the Iranian economy began to crumble, sending unemployment rates skyrocketing. At this point, the British felt the conditions were right to eliminate PM Mosaddeq and return to the previous arrangements beneficial to supplying the British control over Iranian oil once again.

The British government reportedly approached the US government, specifically the CIA, for assistance with executing a coup, at which point the Truman administration had no interest. It wasn't until after the Eisenhower administration took office that the threat of the spread of communism made the British request appear beneficial and pushed the US into action in Iran.²

The Cold War was fully underway in the early 1950's and preventing the spread of Soviet-backed communism consumed American foreign policy. When the British government approached newly elected President Eisenhower asking for assistance with the coup, they presented the rise of the communist Tudeh party in Iranian politics as evidence that Iran posed a threat to the US and the world. This evidence coupled with Iran's deteriorating economy was enough to convince the administration that Iran was in danger of falling under Soviet influence. Thus, Allen W. Dulles, the director of central intelligence, approved \$1 million to be used "in any way that would bring about the fall of Mosaddeq." From the American perspective, the goal was to install a government in Iran that would be willing to work with Britain on a reasonable oil production agreement, which would enable their economy to stabilize. The US government

viewed a stable Iranian government with pro-western ties to be able to resist any advances communism may attempt in the nation.

The actual operation, codenamed AJAX, required the Shah to endorse two decrees, one firing PM Mosaddeq and another replacing him with the Chief of the Iranian Army General Fazlollah Zehedi. The Shah was reportedly reticent to comply with the plans of the foreigners, though he supported their interests. Once he became convinced, he signed the decrees on 13 August 1953.³ The Army-lead coup now had everything it needed to proceed. Although the coup initially faltered because of a talkative senior Army Officer, it was ultimately successful once pro-shah factions began to spread the word and rallied against pro-Mosaddeq forces. The Army captured Mosaddeq and tried him for high treason as result of his attempt to dissolve parliament, abolish the secret ballot and extending his constitutionally restricted term. Ironically, these actions were a result of his belief there were plots against him and his nationalist partners. As it turns out, he was right, but his actions only served to strengthen the efforts against him.

Following the coup, the Shah enjoyed greater powers than he previously possessed and used those powers to repress the communist Tudeh party. He also agreed to replace the nationalist oil industry with a consortium of British Petroleum and eight European and American companies. As a result, the Iranian economy once again flourished. Initially believed to have been a great success for the US and Britain, the coup accomplished its stated goal of defeating communism in Iran and stabilizing its economy. The long-term effect though would be something no one at the time had conceived. The Shah turned out to not be an effective national leader and his actions are directly responsible for his ouster in 1979 at the hands of Islamist revolutionaries. Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was condemned for human rights violations and political repression as well as exorbitant spending at the expense of Iranian citizens.

Although the short-term effects of the coup were positive, the long-term effects for the US have been disastrous. Operation AJAX had a very profound effect on the population of Iran. It shook the very foundation of their ability to rely on and trust their government, and even the US. This is because the US has always espoused support for democratically elected governments, yet when faced with one that did not suit it, the US simply replaced it with one friendly to western ideas and principles. In fact, US aid and funding for Iran after the coup only further strengthened the belief that the Shah was subjugated to the US. This only further weakens the ability of Iranians to believe in the efficacy of democracy. The Iranian populace also blames the American government for their treatment under the Shah. Although, it was a period of relative economic prosperity for Iran, the Shah's CIA-trained secret police were effective at silencing opposition to his government. While one can certainly argue that Iran was not truly a democracy because of the role the monarchy plays in governing the nation; culturally, Iran and before it Persia, was ruled by a monarchy for 2500 years. Because of the importance it played in their history, it is in their minds, a different type of democracy, but democracy just the same. In this case, it is clear the US government certainly has the capability to effect a regime change. However, without the correct approach and long-term follow through, Iran serves a greater threat now than it did prior to 1953.

Iran is not the only nation the United States has become involved in with a stated goal of stabilizing the government and providing for an environment in which democracy can flourish. Haiti has been a pet project for the American government since 1915 when it sent a contingent of Marines to the small island nation to restore public order following a revolt, which resulted in the populace hunting, killing and dismembering the president at the time. The US occupied Haiti for the next 19 years and guided its governmental operations. The Marines were withdrawn from the

island in 1934 and the nation remained fairly stable until 1986 when the military gained control of it following the ouster of the Duvalier family who ruled from 1957-1986.⁴ After four years of turbulent turnover in governments, former priest Jean-Bertrand Aristide was elected, receiving more than two-thirds of the vote. Six months after taking office however, he was ousted in a coup. In accordance with their constitution, Supreme Court Justice Joseph Nerette was named Provisional President and elections were scheduled for December 1991. These elections were blocked however, and a non-constitutional military government controlled the country.

In response to the rule of an illegitimate government, crushing economic woes and a large flow of Haitian refugees to the United States, the US executed Operation Uphold Democracy. The operation landed 20,000 US troops in September 1994 on the small island nation and restored the exiled president Jean-Bertrand Aristide to power. The operation succeeded in its goals to restore the democratically elected government of Haiti and stem the flow of emigration out of Haiti. Six months after the troops landed on Haiti, they withdrew and turned the operation over to the United Nations.⁵ Aristide's term was over in 1996 and the Haitian constitution forbids consecutive terms. Rene Preval, a prominent ally of Aristide and 1991 Prime Minister under Aristide won the ensuing election with 88% of the vote, though only 5% of the population voted. Aristide did however run for re-election and won in 2000. The election was widely dismissed as flawed however, and international aid was frozen. By 2004, conditions in the country had worsened due to the lack of outside aid flowing into the nation, and in February, armed rebels began to take control of the cities. Aristide was forced to flee again, though he claims he was kidnapped by the CIA and taken to the Central African Republic.

The United Nations enacted the UN Stabilization Mission for Haiti and the US responded by sending 3,300 troops along with Chile, Canada and France for a total of 3600 troops in the

country. The mission remains in place and active today with a recently increased authorized troop level of up to 6,940 UN troops. In 2006, free constitutional elections were held and Rene Preval once again emerged victorious.⁶

Today Haiti is still a broken nation. The provisions required to support its population outnumber its natural resources. Its forests have been over harvested leading to widespread erosion of topsoil into the sea. Hurricanes routinely batter its inhabitants and infrastructure, destroying any new developments. It is by far the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere. With only a 65% literacy rate, the nation has root problems they must solve before any government has a chance at success. Simply surviving is the primary concern for most of its citizens. When those citizens do not possess what they need in order to survive, they will resort to whatever means necessary. So while the US and other governments concentrate on security and governance, the nation truly needs help with infrastructure, education, and industry. If UN efforts are to succeed there, the focus of foreign efforts need to address the root problems Haitians face. Security and governance are certainly critical to the success of any nation, but so are the basics of self-support.

While the American involvement in establishing a stable government in Haiti is not an example of change in regime from one stable government to another, it demonstrates several factors important to the question at hand. First, it demonstrates that the American government is very capable at ousting the leadership of a nation, which is the cornerstone of regime change. It also shows the US is capable at forming a new political system in conjunction with coalition partners and the subject nation. Also evident is the notion that the population must buy into the new political processes and institutions, and have some sort of connection to it if it is to succeed. Most importantly though, the population must be able to provide for itself, and accordingly, any

form of government must provide the population that ability. Revolutions therefore, cannot be thrust upon the citizenry of a nation, they must come from within.

From the examples examined here, I conclude that although the United States government is very adept at ousting regimes they deem to be unfit or undesirable; however, they are not adept at replacing the deposed regime with one that experiences success in the long-term. The Shah's initial success at ruling Iran was encouraging; however, the festering anti-American sentiment that grew among the populace is equally discouraging. Because analysts can easily connect the 1953 Iranian coup to the 1979 Iranian revolution and current anti-American sentiment in Iran, the coup was ultimately a failure. Likewise in Haiti, the inability of any government to survive without military intervention is a clear indicator that the US has thus far been unable to achieving a successful regime change.

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¹ Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men*, p 98.

² Ibid, p 136.

³ Iran Chamber "A Short Account".

⁴ GlobalSecurity.org "Haiti Introduction"

⁵ GlobalSecurity.org "Uphold Democracy"

⁶ GlobalSecurity.org "Secure Tomorrow"

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